



Operation Randall

tackling rural crime
Newsletter

Issue 29 | November 2022

 @RuralCrimeNfk

Introduction

I am not sure where the past month has gone, it's been a busy one! The beginning of the month saw us host our second rural crime briefing when we were joined by Norfolk's Police and Crime Commissioner, Giles Orpen-Smellie. It was a fantastic event kindly hosted by Mr and Mrs Crisp in Gressenhall, and we had a good attendance and a healthy discussion around several issues and concerns.

The following weekend, PC Chris Holmes, PC Alex Lovelock, SC Jonathan Jackson and I attended the rearranged Sandringham Game and Country Fair alongside the Environment Agency's fisheries enforcement team - their decision to bring with them a tank of fish was a great attraction for the youngsters and all! The weather was fantastic for the time of the year, and it was a well-attended event.

The following weekend PC Chris Holmes and I attended the National Rural and Wildlife Crime Conference in Staffordshire. It was a great opportunity to engage with our counterparts across the country and liaise with essential partner agencies like Defra, Natural England, RSPB, RSPCA, and many more. We took part in several workshops across the weekend which no doubt will prove very useful in our day-to-day work.

I was also honoured to receive the WWF Rural Crime Enforcer of the Year 2022 award. I consider this very

much a team effort, and as a team we have had some great results over the past year. The specialist knowledge of some of our partner agencies which have supported our investigations is invaluable – we are a small team and rely on colleagues from other teams, partner agencies and members of public reporting concerns to us.

Addition from Chris's line manager, Sgt Matt Paine: *"Chris speaks modestly about his work, specifically this month in remarking on his honour on receiving his award. For me and his colleagues, this award means an awful lot: it is a fitting recognition of his work over the last 12 months. His passion and enthusiasm are matched by his knowledge and understanding, and Norfolk police are proud to have him. I agree with him that we are a small team and do rely on the support and work of partners, but I'm sure you will all join me in thanking Chris for his work, and the impact he has had on rural crime enforcement within Norfolk. Well done, Chris!"*

To finish the month, we supported colleagues on Saturday night with policing the night-time economy because of the Halloween weekend.

We attended the events I've mentioned above in addition to our rural policing work and delivering further training to our control room colleagues.



NEED TO TALK TO US?

PC Chris Shelley | christopher.shelley@norfolk.police.uk | 07900 407106

Wildlife Crime Result

Some of you may remember that more than a year ago now, I told you about the policing team carrying out a warrant in Weeting – it concerned birds of prey being killed. As with many of our jobs, we were unable to share any more information at the time because it had to go through the legal court process. Now this has been finalised and I can share with you what happened in court:

A Weeting gamekeeper appeared in court today Wednesday 5 October 2022 and admitted shooting and poisoning several birds of prey.

Matthew Stroud, age 46, of Fengate in Weeting, appeared at Norwich Magistrates' Court today (Wednesday 5 October 2022) and admitted:
Three counts of using poisoned bait on or before 19 August 2021 and 14 September 2021.

Six counts of killing a Common Buzzard (a non-Schedule 1 wild bird) at Weeting between 10 August and 14 September 2021.

One count of intentionally killing a Northern Goshawk (a Schedule 1 wild bird) at Weeting on or about 10 August 2021.

One count of possessing a regulated substance - Strychnine Hydrochloride – without a licence on 14 September 2021.

One count of possessing 4 shotguns to kill a Schedule 1 wild bird on 14 September 2021.

One count of releasing 3,400 Common Pheasants into the wild between 1 June and 14 September 2021 contrary to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

One count of incorrectly storing a biocidal product –

Rentokil Phostoxin – on 14 September 2021 contrary to the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. He received a 12-month Community Order and was ordered to do 200 hours of unpaid work, fined £692 and ordered to pay costs of £145, compensation of £288.72 and a victim surcharge of £95. The court also ordered the forfeiture and destruction of all Stroud's firearms, mobile phones and any chemicals.

The court heard how the investigation started when RSPB officers found a young pheasant dead in Belvedere Wood, Weeting, on 19 August 2021.

Tests later confirmed the pheasant had been poisoned with Strychnine Hydrochloride.

Further intelligence led Norfolk Police to execute a warrant at Stroud's home, Belvedere Wood and Oisier Carr Wood on 14 September 2021 where the following discoveries were made:

Three dead buzzards were found at two release pens in Oisier Carr Wood. Tests later confirmed they had been shot.

Two pheasant carcasses with extremely high levels of Strychnine Hydrochloride and a poisoned Common Buzzard were found in Belvedere Wood - a Site of Special Scientific Interest because of its internationally important population of Stone Curlews

Two bottles of Strychnine Chloride were found in the glovebox of Stroud's all-terrain vehicle, and a bottle of Phostoxin discovered by officers in a lean-to style shed attached to his house.

WhatsApp Group

The Operation Randall WhatsApp group is expanding. At present the group mainly consists of partner agencies, key landowners and administrators of other social media rural groups. I am currently looking at increasing the size of this group so if you meet one or more of the above criteria – work for a partner agency, key landowner or you administer another rural group on social media - or if you think you would benefit or be able to contribute in any way, I want to hear from you. You can contact me on email at christopher.shelley@norfolk.pnn.police.uk

In addition, Stroud's mobile phone contained photos of a dead Goshawk and five dead Common Buzzards. He later confessed to officers that all the photos were of birds he had killed.

PC Chris Shelley, Norfolk Constabulary's Rural Crime Officer, said: "This investigation is one of the biggest cases of its kind that we have dealt with in Norfolk.

"Stroud actions were dangerous and inhumane – he shot and poisoned birds of prey as he saw fit, and at will, because it suited him to do so. He also used a highly dangerous poison - one that has been banned in the UK for the last 15 years – indiscriminately, which could have had a disastrous effect on other local wildlife and showed a scant disregard for the safety of others.

"We're committed to working with all partners to tackle rural crime and have worked closely with colleagues from the RSPB, the National Wildlife Crime Unit and Natural England throughout this investigation. It is because of this close collaboration with them that we have been able to bring this case to court."

Tom Grose, RSPB Investigations Officer, said:

"Laying poison baits out in the open is not only illegal but extremely dangerous and irresponsible. Baits like those being used present a deadly risk to any animal or person that might come across it.

"It is particularly troubling that this was happening on an SPA, a designated area where wildlife and nature should have the highest legal protection.

"We would like to thank Norfolk Police for leading such a thorough investigation, and to Natural England, the National Wildlife Crime Unit and Crown Prosecution Service for their support."

Ashley Petchey of the Crown Prosecution Service said: "This was a case where Mr Stroud has, whilst in his position as a gamekeeper, killed wild birds by shooting and poisoning. He has also released non-native species into a SSSI.

"The scale of the offences in this case demonstrates the lengths people will go to in order to persecute raptors.

"The Crown take all cases of raptor persecution seriously and where the full code test is met, bring offenders to justice."

Heating Oil—Secure it Now!

When looking at our fuel thefts, the current concern remains white diesel being stolen from building sites and compounds as per last month. Although we have had a very mild Autumn so far, we can expect that to change at some point so we would expect to see some heating oil thefts. Now is the time to think about your security before winter sets in. This means considering general security products such as CCTV (including mobile monitoring systems), lighting if the tank is overlooked, fitting alarms, and locking the yard/garden/shed housing the tank.

Also, please consider fitting an alarm to the tank to alert you to a sudden drop in fuel levels or tampering with the lock. The use of PIR alarms can be effective.

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Outbuilding Burglaries

Police are urging residents to keep outbuildings secure and remain vigilant following a series of rural burglaries.

The appeal comes after the following incidents:

Lowestoft Road, Hopton: At around 12.30am on 24 October 2022, two suspects forced access to three outbuildings and stole power tools, a till and horse-riding clothes.

Jay Lane, Hopton: Sometime between 10.30pm on 24 October and 6.45am on 25 October, suspect/s forced access to a barn and a storage unit. Nothing was stolen.

Browston Lane, Browston: Sometime between 6pm on 23 October and 8.30am on 24 October 2022, suspect/s forced entry to a stable and stole a red quad bike.

Officers are investigating whether these crimes are linked and are keen to hear from any witnesses or anyone who has seen any suspicious activity in these areas at the times stated above.

Detective Inspector Matt Jenkins said: "With nights drawing in there are more opportunities for criminals to strike during hours of darkness. Please ensure outbuildings are secure and well-lit, alarms are activated and items are secured with locks/chains if possible."

Officers are offering farmers and landowners in rural communities the following crime prevention advice: Try to note down the car registration number of any suspicious vehicle, if it's safe to do so, and report it to us.

If possible, remove all GPS kit from machines when not in use, especially if the machinery is left out overnight.

Review security at your outbuildings, as well as any

building where equipment is serviced. Always keep outbuildings locked and secure.

Record the serial numbers of your equipment and take a photo of the serial number and keep it safe. Security mark all your kit, possibly with a UV marker or permanent black marker, with the name of your location and postcode – make it as visible as possible - to make it unattractive to a potential thief.

Ivory Act

Since June 2022 it has been illegal for individuals and traders/businesses to sell or offer to sell an ivory product (or offer for hire) unless the item has a valid exemption certificate which can be requested on the official .GOV website.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/declare-ivory-you-intend-to-sell-or-hire-out>

More information is available here too:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/dealing-in-items-containing-ivory-or-made-of-ivory>

There are a few exceptions to this legislation, but these are quite limited. Please do not panic if you have ivory items at home. This is not a ban on items already owned but you won't be able to sell an item unless you get a certificate.

It's also important to be aware of sellers offering 'decorative bone' for sale when in fact, it is ivory. This is illegal and we will act where appropriate. Anyone found breaking the Ivory Act 2018 faces fines of up to £250,000 or a custodial sentence.

Should you see anything for sale, and you are concerned please contact us via email at operationrandall@norfolk.police.uk.

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Hare Coursing and Wildlife Investigations

We are continuing to see a decrease year-on-year of reports of hare coursing. If a crime is in progress, please always call us on 999. We also encourage the use of What3Words to provide us with an exact location and please give us as much detail as possible, including descriptions of people and vehicles involved but only if it is safe to do so and doesn't put you at risk.

Other enquiries we're looking into include a report of a cat being entangled in a snare and as I write this, we haven't yet established if any offence has been committed. That said, it's always important to remember that if you are using snares, please make sure you are using best practice, setting in appropriate positions, and checking them regularly to prevent untargeted species from being harmed.

Further advice can be found on the BASC website here: <https://basc.org.uk/codes-of-practice/snares-for-fox-control-in-england/>

Arrests following illegal rave - Thetford

Police have arrested two people following an illegal rave near Thetford.

Officers were called to an area of woodland

between Methwold and Methwold Hyde in the early hours of yesterday morning (Sunday 30 October 2022), around 12.20am. The landowner reported a number of cars in the area and hearing loud music.

Officers were deployed and discovered an illegal rave with around 100 people in attendance and 20 vehicles in the area.

The event stopped at around 9.30am yesterday morning and two were arrested for offences relating to drug driving and the supply of controlled drugs.

Officers seized one vehicle which had no insurance and the driver was reported for the offence. Speakers and a large nitrous oxide bottle was also seized.

Closing Remarks

Apologies this month is a little later than normal due to some training courses we have been on. November has started fairly wet and miserable, lets hope the rest of the month improves!

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November in the Countryside

November on our farms can often be perceived as a quieter month, but I think to call any month in the farming calendar 'quiet' is a long shot. There might not be as much colour in the fields this time of year, as arable farms continue to plough fields in preparation for next year's crops. Winter wheat continues to be drilled until middle of the month and our sugar beet fields turn from green to brown as they are harvested to produce our sugar for the next year. Around 50% of the UK's sugar demand is supplied by British sugar beet, which now is nearly all grown in the eastern region. On livestock farms, the work never stops with most cattle now housed for winter. The daily jobs of feeding and bedding up with fresh straw and the like becomes a daily task. Livestock left out on grass will often need to be supplemented with extra food because the grass has stopped growing and its quality is no longer adequate.

Although many people associate the 5th of November with Bonfire Night, traditionally, it is also an important date in a shepherd's calendar because if you put your tup (male sheep) with your flock of ewes on the 5th of November, you 'should' have Spring lambs

born on the 1st of April. Obviously with the modernisation of farming, many farmers now lamb slightly earlier to feed into the traditional Easter lamb market - in fact with some lambing at all times of year - but many do still lamb at the beginning of April with the opportunity to feed the milking ewes on better grass.

In the countryside, the colours of the trees continue to change and by the end of the month many will be bare. Hedgehogs and other hibernating animals should be safely secured away for the colder months with the hope of not being disturbed! The deer rut is full swing so beware of deer's spending more time close to the road.

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